

Question Time

Written question 1 from Mr A. Jones, resident of the Borough:

“As set out in its consultation commencing in July 2024, the government proposed to revise the NPPF, significantly increasing housing targets and reducing or removing the protections afforded to the Green Belt. Under the NPPF’s proposed transitional arrangements, the changes can be delayed or avoided by issuing the Local Plan for examination within a month of the publication of the new NPPF.

Please will this committee provide the timetable the council is following to ensure it submits the draft Local Plan for examination under the transitional arrangements, having completed the required 6-week consultation?”

Response from the Chair of the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee:

The government has consulted on proposed changes to the NPPF and at the previous meeting of Licensing and Planning Policy Committee we approved a comprehensive response identifying our concerns with the proposals, specifically in relation to the introduction of Grey Belt and the transitional arrangements set out for Local Plans. We understand that a significant number of responses were received to the consultation and there may be delays in the updated NPPF being published.

The timetable for progressing the local plan is as set out in our Local Development Scheme that was approved by LPPC in November 2023 which set out an expediated timetable for preparing the Local Plan to meet a June 2025 submission deadline. At the next meeting of LPPC, the committee will be presented with the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan that is supported by an evidence base. Whilst we would like to be in a position to speed up this process, we cannot. Some of the evidence base is being produced by external specialists to previously agreed timescales. We have asked if it is possible to speed up the delivery of these workstreams and unfortunately this has not been possible.

It is important that LPPC has the full evidence base available when making a recommendation to Full Council on the Proposed Submission Local Plan, this will reduce the risk of future challenges. LPPC will debate the content of the Proposed Submission Local Plan and could recommend to Full Council that changes are made to the Local Plan prior to the public consultation commencing.

Following approval by Full Council, the public consultation on the Pre-Submission Local Plan is due to commence in early January in accordance with our Local Development Scheme (2023). It is important to note that we are required to conform with our LDS, this is a legal requirement that the Inspector will check during the early stages of the Local Plan Examination.

Public consultation in January avoids public consultation over the festive break and enables officers to make any changes to the plan and supporting documents agreed at Full Council prior to the formal consultation period commencing.

However, it is important to note that if Full Council approve the Local Plan for consultation in December, residents and all those with an interest in the Local Plan will be able to view the evidence base, the Pre-Submission Local Plan considered by Full council (and any changes

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to the Plan that were agreed at Full Council). This will provide extra time for those with an interest in the Local Plan to consider how they will respond to the consultation when the consultation period commences.

If following the close of the consultation on the Pre-Submission Local Plan, the new NPPF hasn't been published, we will make every effort to submit our local plan to the planning inspectorate in time so that we benefit from the transitional arrangements (essentially our plan being examined against the December 2023 version of the NPPF). However, the time taken to submit the plan will depend on the level of responses received and how the responses are submitted (e.g. digital consultation platform, email or hard copies of response forms) as following the close consultation, officers will need to:

1. process all the representations received;
2. present them in the format requested by the appointed Planning Inspector and
3. prepare other documentation ready for submission, including a summary of the main issues raised during the Regulation 19 consultation.

The LDS states that the Local Plan will be submitted in May 2025. This is based on officers' experience of the amount of work required to be undertaken between Regulation 19 Consultation ending and the submission of the Plan. If we were to be in a position to submit early, LPPC would need to approve a new LDS.